
VODP'S EXPERIENCE CAPITALIZATION JOURNEY

Anthony Wanyoto



To build on the achievements of the Vegetable Oil Development Project in Uganda, different experience capitalization trainings and workshops are being held with staff and stakeholders of a follow up project – the National Oil Palm Project (NOPP). It is anticipated that the capitalization process will help strengthen the monitoring and evaluation component at NOPP, and help bring about change in the agriculture sector more widely.

Cover “This journey started in Kigali, where I was first exposed to the approach by CTA”

Population growth and rising incomes in Uganda continue to fuel an annual growth rate of 9% in the domestic and regional demand for vegetable oil and its by-products. However, the country imports 60-70% of the oil-based products it requires. The Vegetable Oil Development Project has been Uganda’s strategic effort to increase domestic vegetable oil production, address rural poverty by involving smallholder farmers in oil crops production, and improve the health of the population through increased vegetable oil intake.

In a country where agriculture is the most practiced economic activity and the largest employer, the oil production project could not be more appropriate. Government statistics indicate that although more than 70% of Ugandans practice agriculture, less than 20% do so on an intensive and commercial scale. The lack of cheap and available credit has been singled out as one of the main hurdles, and the government has been trying to extend credit to rural farmers to boost their productivity and facilitate value addition.

Since this project started more than 10 years ago, Uganda has been able to increase the production of edible cooking oil to match the local demand, which currently stands at 120,000 tonnes, and cut the amount of imports of the same by 55,000 tonnes. To many Ugandans, VODP has been a wonderful intervention that they will live to remember. VODP

has empowered people financially and socially, integrating them into the cash economy and equipping them not only with modern farming technologies, but also with financial literacy tools to manage the income accrued from their farming activities. This has all had a positive impact in terms of sustainable development, and many lessons can be drawn before the project finishes in December 2019.

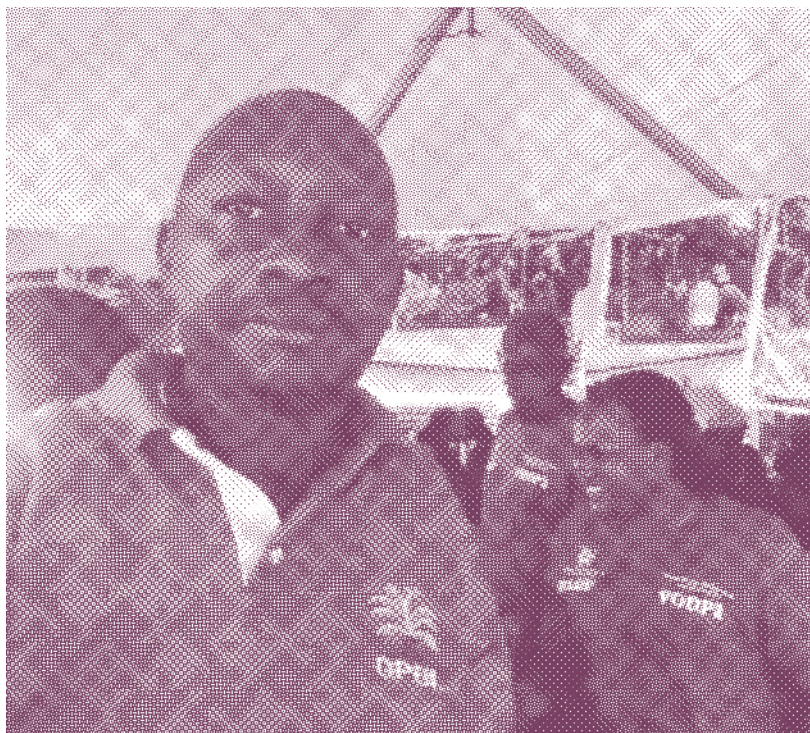
Scaling VODP success

A new project – NOPP – is being rolled out from 2019 to 2025 as a follow-up, and it intends to expand oil palm production in other districts of Uganda. Additionally, a concept note for a National Oil Seeds Project (NOSP) is also being prepared with the objective of increasing oil seed production, improving incomes, increasing milling capacities and creating employment opportunities. In the process of these developments, several attempts have been made to streamline experience capitalization in order to document VODP’s cross-cutting experiences across multiple interventions, and benefit these new initiatives.

Plans are underway to ensure that all of those working on the new NOPP and NOSP initiatives are abreast of the new framework under which the projects will run, considering the challenges and lessons learnt during the 10 years of implementing VODP. As such, several

trainings sessions are being held by VODP to familiarise all stakeholders with the experience capitalization methodology. All participants in these trainings – from the top managers of the value chain to the smallholder farmers – will also be introduced to the strategic bottlenecks of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process through which the project's results will be tracked and documented, and the impact for local communities measured.

Discussions at the trainings sessions and workshops will also focus on the strengths and weaknesses identified during the past ten years. The purpose is to develop workable action points that will be incorporated into the projects' annual work plans, such as the gathering of information for communication outputs; and the budget approved by the donors and by the Government of Uganda. VODP worked in 53 of the 112 districts in Uganda. With a total cost of €185 million, NOPP will scale up VODP's successes to four more districts. The main goal is to increase the sustainability of rural livelihoods through investment in an oil palm industry that complies with modern environmental and social standards.



Increasing project reach

Attaining the above objective will not be easy, but several strategies have been lined up to extend the reach of the project. These strategies include the institutionalization of the experience capitalization approach to strengthen the M&E process – the details of this will be factored into the annual work plan and budget as an output. A knowledge management and communications plan will also be developed to create various outputs for mass consumption to extend the project reach.

Communication content will include a total of 700 success stories featuring beneficiaries narrating their experiences as part of VODP (all of them grouped as the “Our Story” series). These articles will be accompanied by professional photographs that will capture the work of role model farmers. This will help bring the print articles to life and to tell the stories from a visual perspective. Other communication outputs will include 10 video documentaries showing success stories, which will be circulated on both traditional and social media platforms.

Above Sharing results at the National Agricultural Show in Jinja

The main goal is to increase the sustainability of rural livelihoods through investment in an oil palm industry that complies with modern environmental and social standards.

One might ask; what criteria will be followed while generating this content, and who will be taking the lead on it? The content gathering process will follow a set of guidelines that will be developed at the beginning of the project in order to guide the creation of community experiences that tell a story – all of which build on the approach we started discussing in 2017. It is in the best interest of the project that all M&E officers adopt the guidelines as indicators to gauge their progress.

Institutionalising experience capitalization

Our experience capitalization journey started in Kigali, Rwanda in 2017, where I was first exposed to the approach by CTA, together with other colleagues, oil palm farmer leaders and private sector partners. Workshops were also held in Arusha, Rome and Amsterdam to help us adopt this approach within our workplace. As the current “champion” at VODP, I have been instrumental in spearheading different experience capitalization plans, arguing in favour of the approach and empowering the team to embrace it.

After sharing documents, pictures and articles from the CTA experience capitalization workshops, some of the lessons have already been adopted within the annual work plan, and by the budget team.

The VODP team is now creating a data bank of content to record success stories, project articles, farmer profiles, photos and experience capitalization materials to help characterise the 10-year journey of the project. These resources can then be used by stakeholders involved with the project during various presentations, such as implementation review meetings.

But the capitalization of an experience is not an end in itself. Each capitalization process aims for change, be that in public perceptions, behaviours, practices or policies. This explains why part of the work being undertaken by VODP and the new projects will educate all M&E officers about the experience capitalization process. To ensure these results, it has been resolved that NOPP will have a separate department for KM and learning, with a dedicated manager. The department will have a KM officer and M&E officers based in their own hubs, together with communications staff.

*Right VODP has empowered people, both financially and socially
(Photo: Peter Kasirye)*





Left A proud and happy sunflower farmer in the Oyam district, Northern Uganda

A dedicated focal person – or “champion” – for NOPP will also be identified to design and implement the experience capitalization work plan. Unlike in VODP, where the champion model was hard to implement, NOPP will have additional staff in the M&E team who will be able to provide support. The project will move from having a single champion at the centre, to having several sub-champions in the different project hubs.

Based on the new funding agreement for NOPP, signed between IFAD’s President and Uganda’s Finance Minister, 30,800 farmers are set to benefit from this new project. To document such achievements, especially by a team that is just being set up, is going to be an uphill task. And like any project, there are other challenges likely to hamper the implementation of the experience capitalization framework, such as the interest of staff to participate in the process. A WhatsApp group has been created for colleagues working at the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, through which experience capitalization plans, works and experiences are shared and discussed. At the office level, members of the group are also in talks with the Ministry to move experience capitalization discussions online to

the Ministry’s website and social media platforms, for better engagement among the various team hubs, and to increase knowledge on the subject.

In his 2019 New Year’s message, the President of Uganda noted that the country will look to half the number of imports and increase the number of products it exports to foreign countries. With the start of NOPP, the new design of NOSP, and with other ongoing projects such as the Kalangala Oil Palm Project, a self-sustaining oil production system may not be out of reach after all. This is all showing that Uganda truly is the “Pearl of Africa”.



Anthony William Wanyoto is a communications, media and PR specialist, marketer by training, farmer and businessman. He works as communication and knowledge management officer for the Vegetable Oil Development Project Phase 2, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Uganda.

E-mail: awanyoto@gmail.com

This is one of the results of the process started by the “Capitalization of Experiences for Greater Impact in Rural Development” project, implemented by CTA, FAO and IICA and supported by IFAD.
<http://experience-capitalization.cta.int>

Country: Uganda
Region: East Africa
Date: June 2019
Keywords: advocacy; training; adoption